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LETTER DATED 20 AUGUST 1997 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SIERRA LEONE TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Upon instructions from my Government, I wish to bring to your most urgent attention and that of the membership of the Security Council the dastardly acts perpetrated by the criminal and illegal regime (Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)/Revolutionary United Front (RUF)) against the people of Sierra Leone. As a result of the coup d'état of 25 May 1997, the overwhelming majority of the people of Sierra Leone have made abundantly clear their total opposition to the military junta. A very large proportion of the citizenry of Freetown, the capital, as well as other areas of the country have left the country and are now seeking refuge in various countries of the subregion and other parts of the world. Owing to the brutality demonstrated by the coup d'état makers on the day of the coup d'état and thereafter, those citizens remaining in the capital were urged to stay at home and keep out of the streets.

As a result of the profound anguish of those who are still enduring the criminal acts of the regime, the National Union of Sierra Leone Students (NUSS) decided to call for a pro-democracy march on 18 August 1997. A public notice issued by the students stated, inter alia: "It is high time we the majority of Sierra Leoneans opposed to this overthrow of democracy and blatant abuse of our rights and liberties speak out."

The illegal regime, fully cognizant of its unpopularity, was determined to prevent the pro-democracy march. It therefore decided to ban the march and threaten severe punishment should the students proceed with it.

The students as well as other groups such as youths, members of the Labour Congress, the Sierra Leone Teachers' Union, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), the Women's National Salvation Front, and religious groups were not intimidated. A very large pro-democracy demonstration took place as planned in the Lungi area, where AFRC/RUF has no control. In Sierra Leone's second largest city, Bo, the demonstrations commenced but was broken up by the illegal regime. In Freetown, AFRC/RUF displayed massive demonstration of military force and actually used brute force against demonstrators. It was thus able to frustrate the legitimate rights of the citizens of Sierra Leone to demonstrate peacefully. By their excessive use of force and lack of respect for all democratic rights of the citizenry, AFRC/RUF killed two students who were

trying to take cover in the Nurses' Training Hostel near Connaught Hospital. Six students were seriously wounded and eight others sustained minor injuries. Some 60 to 70 demonstrators were arrested and many of them are still in detention. Furthermore, during the day three journalists who were covering the demonstrations were arrested and detained. To aggravate the agony of the people, the illegal regime on Monday, 18 August 1997, imposed a new curfew from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.

You may recall that the Security Council in two presidential statements, issued on 11 July 1997 (S/PRST/1997/36) and on 6 August 1997 (S/PRST/1997/42), condemned the continuing violence and threats of violence by the junta towards the civilian population, foreign nationals and personnel of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) monitoring group, and called for an end to such acts of violence.

Despite these warnings, the junta, as mentioned above, has continued to inflict untold sufferings on the people of Sierra Leone. Regrettably, AFRC/RUF have not yet recognized that they are in no position to speak on behalf of Sierra Leone or to defend its national sovereignty. It was this lack of awareness of its illegality that led West Africa Magazine of 4 to 10 August 1997 to remind the junta leadership of the following considerations. In a timely editorial entitled "The time bomb ticking in Freetown". The editorial ends as follows:

> "Major Koroma said the same thing, more or less, during his nationwide broadcast. 'We stand', he declared, 'to defend the territorial integrity of Sierra Leone from any aggression, real or threatened; internal or external. Let no one doubt our resolve to do this to the last drop of our blood'.
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> "Bockari and Koroma seem to be conveniently forgetting that they are at the helm of an illegal ship of state which has been roundly condemned by the entire international community. It is, of course, possible (as is now being rumoured) that the junta has been emboldened by a few external mavericks who are bent on mischief. But even these, if they do exist, must know that they cannot take on the rest of the world."

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) James O. C. JONAH
Ambassador
Permanent Representative